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ABSTRACT

The survey explored the informational, educational, and cultural interests of older people in the Schoolcraft College area to determine what kinds of programs were of most interest to them. A one-page large print questionnaire was administered by a staff person except in the cases where a copy of the questionnaire had been made available through a newspaper article and was filled out independently. Of the 9,067 persons 65 years or older in the district, 418 responded to the questionnaire. A segment (from 13 to 36 percent) of the respondents indicated an interest in one or more of the 13 retirement living subject matter areas. Various cultural events and short courses available at Schoolcraft College were of some interest to respondents--films and plays ranked highest at 22 percent; sculpture was lowest at 2 percent. Half the respondents indicated a preference for daytime programs; only 10 percent preferred evening programs. Preference was also expressed for programs in the neighborhood. Transportation and financial assistance needs were also investigated. On the basis of the survey, proposals for programs were offered. (The appendix includes a description of the organized senior citizen groups surveyed.) (AG)

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A SURVEY OF EDUCATIONAL AND INFORMATIONAL NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE LIVING IN THE SCHOOLCRAFT COLLEGE DISTRICT

by

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Introduction

Increasing support is being given to the role of the community college in providing opportunities for older adults to enhance the later years of life through education. The purpose of this survey, funded jointly by the Schoolcraft Foundation, Schoolcraft College and the Institute of Gerontology, was to explore the informational, educational, and cultural interests of older people in the area served by Schoolcarft College, in order to ascertain specifically what kinds of programs were of the most interest to the older citizens.

The apparent need for this type of programming was underscored when the Schoolcraft College Senior Citizens Advisory Committee endorsed the proposed survey. The Committee pledged its support and offered assistance in locating older persons to be contacted.

The Schoolcraft Foundation of Schoolcraft College also endorsed the survey, with the request that a special attempt be made to search out older adults who do not usually attend organized senior citizen groups or visit senior centers.

Methods of the Survey

In joint planning sessions between Schoolcraft College and the Institute of Gerontology, it was decided to administer a questionnaire to various groups of older people.

Organized groups of senior citizens, as well as other groups of adults were surveyed. Older individuals independent of the usual community groups were sought out at places where large numbers of people congregate. In addition, an appeal was made to independent older adults to participate in the survey through a newspaper article which contained the survey questions and asked interested persons to complete and mail the information to Schoolcraft College.

The Questionnaire

A one page questionnaire, in large print, was designed to be easily read and completed by older people. Except for the newspaper survey, the questionnaire was administered by a staff person. A short, explanatory introduction preceded completion of the questionnaire by various groups. Assistance was available for persons who needed help in filling out the form. Participants were encouraged to ask questions.

Items of the questionnaire were designed to obtain the following information:

1. Community in which respondent lived.
2. Specific informational, educational and cultural interests of the respondent.
3. Preferred time of day for courses and programs.

4. Preferred location of courses - campus or community.
5. Extent of transporation needs in order to participate in programs.
6. Extent to which respondent felt older people should have special fee consideration.

The Older Population in the Schoolcraft College District

Table I shows the number and proportion of older people living in the Schoolcraft College District. It is noteworthy that older people living in the cities of Northville and Plymouth comprise a higher proportion of older people (10.4% and 8.8%) than in the general population of Michigan (8.5%).

TABLE I
Numbers of Persons 65 Years and Older Living in the Schoolcraft College District, 1971[a]

Political Units	Total Population	Number of Older People	Percent of Total Population
Garden City	41,864	1,286	3.0%
Livonia	110,109	4,852	4.4
City of Northville	5,409	564	10.4
Northville Township	9,522	648	6.8
City of Plymouth	11,758	1,035	8.8
Plymouth Township	17,497	682	3.8
Total	196,150	9,067	4.6%
State of Michigan	8,875,083	752,955	8.5%

[a]General Population Characteristics, Michigan Bureau of the Census, U. S. Department of Commerce, August 1971.

Number and Residence of Older Respondents

As shown in Table II, questionnaires were obtained from 418 respondents. The largest proportion of respondents (44.9 percent) live in the Plymouth Area.

TABLE II
Number of Respondents in Various Communities

City and Townships	Number of Older Respondents	Percent of Older Respondents
Garden City	28	9.0%
Livonia	103	24.6
Northville, City and Township	72	17.2
Plymouth, City and Township	188	44.9
Other	17	4.0
TOTAL	418	100 %

Groups Participating in the Survey

As shown in Table III, a variety of groups of older people participated in the survey. More detailed information about each of the groups is presented in Appendix A to this report.

TABLE III
GROUPS OF PEOPLE AND OTHERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY

City and Group	Sponsor	Number of Respondents
Garden City		
Garden City Senior Citizens Club	G. C. Parks and Recreation	32
Happy Hour Club	G. C. United Presbyterian Church	6
Livonia		
Harmony Club	Livonia Parks and Recreation	25
McNamara Towers #1	City of Livonia	23
McNamara Towers #2	City of Livonia	47
St. Michaels Church		1
Northville		
Northville Senior Citizens Club	Northville Parks and Recreation	32
Our Lady of Victory Church		4
Women's Society of Christian Service	United Methodist Church	17
Plymouth		
Plymouth Senior Citizens Club	Community Fund	91
Tonquish Creek Manor	City of Plymouth	10
Plymouth - Northville		
Plymouth-Northville Chapter American Association of Retired Persons		91
Westland		
Westland Center		25
Individuals		
Observer Newspaper		11
Individual Interviews		3
TOTAL ALL RESPONDENTS		418

Findings of the Survey

Respondents were given the opportunity to indicate their interest in educational or informational programs dealing with thirteen practical aspects of retirement living, such as Social Security and good health during the retirement years (see items 1-13 of Appendix B), their interest in various cultural events at Schoolcraft College (see items 14-19 of Appendix B), courses being offered by Schoolcraft College (see 20a - 20o of Appendix B).

Table LV shows proportions of all respondents who indicated an interest in one or more of the thirteen retirement living subject matter areas.

TABLE VI.
INTEREST OF RESPONDENTS IN RETIREMENT SUBJECT MATTER AREAS

Retirement Subject Matter Areas	Percent of Total Respondents in Rank Order (N-418)
1. Medical Care and Services	36%
2. Social Security Benefits	33
3. Making the Most of Retirement Income	32.7
4. Legal Information - Wills and Estate Planning	31.8
5. Good Health During Retirement-Nutrition, Fitness, Personal Hygiene	31
6. The Many Uses of Leisure Time	27.8
7. How to Buy More Economically	27
8. How to Select a Nursing Home	25.5
9. Different Living Arrangement for Retirement Years	24
10. Family and Friend Relationships After Retirement	19
11. Employment Opportunities and Rights for Retired Persons	15
12. Meal Planning and Preparation for the Small Family	14.8
13. Training for Specific Volunteer Opportunities	13.8

Cultural Events and Special Short Courses

Table V shows the interest of respondents in various cultural events at Schoolcraft College and in various short courses being offered by Schoolcraft College.

TABLE V

INTEREST OF RESPONDENTS IN CULTURAL EVENTS AND SHORT COURSES AT SCHOOLCRAFT COLLEGE

Cultural Events	
1. Film Series	22%
2. Musical Concerts at Schoolcraft	22
3. Dramatic Plays at Schoolcraft	17.7
4. Lecture Series	16
5. Campus Tours	15.7
6. Gourmet Dinners	14
Special Short Courses[1]	
1. Bridge & Other Card Games	19.6
2. Knitting	19
3. Square Dancing	18
4. Floral Arranging	15.5
5. Jewelry Making	15
6. Investments After Retirement	11
7. Ceramics	10.5
8. The Bible as Literature	10
9. Oil Painting	9.8
10. Improving Reading Skills	9
11. State & Local Tax Structures	8.8
12. Improving Writing Skills	5.9
13. Conversational Spanish & French	5.9
14. Sculpture	2

[1] Other Special Courses suggested by respondents: sewing, crotcheting, lipspreading, speed reading, photography, book reviews, handyman, chess, understanding diabetes, chair caning, bird watching, German, Norwegian, mental retardation, tennis, modern dancing, upholstery, braille, needlepoint, china painting, piano, cooking, gardening, real estate, politics, legislation,

Respondents were asked to indicate a preference for day or evening programs. Fifty percent of the 418 respondents indicated a preference for day time programs. Only 10 percent of the respondents expressed a preference for evening programs (see Table VI).

TABLE VI

ATTITUDES OR PREFERENCES OF RESPONDENTS TOWARD TIME AND PLACE OF PROBLEMS, AVAILABILITY OF SCHOLARSHIPS, AND TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

Attitudes or Preferences of Respondents	Percent of All Respondents
Time of Program	
Percent who preferred daytime programs	50%
Percent who preferred nighttime programs	10
Place of Program	
Percent who preferred programs in neighborhood	58
Percent who preferred programs at Schoolcraft	11
Availability of Scholarships	
Percent who thought a scholarship should be available	29
Transportation	
Percent who needed transportation to programs at Schoolcraft	26
Percent who needed transportation to neighborhood programs	18

A preference for daytime programs was to be expected. Older people are often fearful of going out in the evening and in some cases, physical disabilities make it difficult for older people to get around at nighttime.

When asked about whether Schoolcraft College should establish a scholarship fund for senior citizen, 29% of those who completed the questionnaire replied in the affirmative (see Table VI).

Table VI shows that respondents expressed a marked preference for programs conducted in a neighborhood location such as a church, union hall, or senior center rather than at Schoolcraft College.

It was anticipated that older people who were to be served by the proposed program would have a transportation problem. Information presented in Table VI does not support this premise. It will be noted, however, that respondents expressed more of a transportation problem getting to Schoolcraft College than to programs in their neighborhood.

Summary and Recommendations

On the basis of survey findings, it appears that some retirement subject matter areas are of more interest to these respondents than others. Accordingly, it is recommended that the proposed pilot Schools for Retirement develop programs based on the following subject matter areas:

Fall Term	Spring Term
1. What one needs to know about social security and medicare.	1. The good uses of free time.
2. Ways to maintain good health in the later years.	2. How to have a good family life in the later years.
3. Making the most of retirement income.	3. Choosing a place to live in retirement.
4. Legal information for the later years.	4. Consumer skills for the later years.

The Distribution of the Aging (see Table I), suggests that one of the proposed programs be offered in Northville while a second program be offered in Livonia.

Respondents indicated a clearcut preference for daytime programs.

Moreover, it appears that those older people who participated in the survey preferred programs conducted in various neighborhood settings.

Interest in cultural events and various short courses at Schoolcraft is large enough to warrent a special effort to promote attendance among these older people.

APPENDIX A

Organized Senior Citizen Groups Surveyed

Garden City

Groups surveyed:

Garden City Senior Citizens Club

Sponsored by the Garden City Parks and Recreation Department, this group meets in a building provided by Parks and Recreation and has an active, recreation-oriented program. Only about half of the group cared to complete the survey.

Happy Hour Club

A small luncheon group sponsored by the Garden City United Presbyterian Church. Members were pleasant, but felt that their needs were taken care of and most failed to see any need for educational or informational type programming.

Livonia

Groups surveyed:

Harmony Club

One of several groups sponsored by Livonia Parks and Recreation Department. Group meets weekly at St. Edith's Church in Livonia. An active, recreation-oriented group. About half of the members utilized the questionnaire.

McNamara Towers #1

This is a low-income subsidized housing unit for Livonia elderly. Survey taken on the day that Social Security checks are in the mail in an effort to take advantage of the heavy traffic in the lobby. Residents agreed to complete the questionnaire while waiting for mail delivery. A late delivery caused many tenants to be quite upset and so disinterested. Others were concerned that transportation problems would prevent them from taking part in any programs the College might develop.

McNamara Towers #2

This is a moderate-income subsidized housing unit for Livonia elderly. Survey was taken on the day that residents gather for a business meeting and recreation program. Survey workers were able to speak to the group as a whole and to visit each table. There were many questions and a great deal of interest expressed in having programs brought to the Towers. Also, opinions expressed that the two Towers groups did not mix and might not if programs were offered at one of the two buildings. President of the group delivered questionnaire to some residents who were not in attendance and these were picked up later in the week. There was no opportunity to meet with these individuals.

Northville City and Township

Groups surveyed:

Northville Senior Citizens Club

This group is sponsored by the Northville Parks and Recreation Department and meets in a small house donated to the city for use by Senior Citizens. The group is trying to develop a variety of programming so that the building will be used daily, but at the present time, use is limited. About 100% response to the survey, with many questions asked and a high degree of interest shown in a variety of program possibilities.

Women's Society of Christian Service

This is a group of older women meeting monthly at the Northville United Methodist Church for fellowship and service projects. The women had gathered to work on items for a bazaar. All were interested--the younger members chose not to complete the questionnaire.

Plymouth City and Township

Groups surveyed:

Plymouth Senior Citizens Club

The oldest and largest of Senior Citizen organizations in Plymouth and recipient of funding from the Community Fund for an activities director. This is another recreation centered group with weekly card games, monthly pot-luck dinners and trips and outings well planned by the activities director. Group was interested in the survey and most completed the questionnaire.

Tonquish Creek Manor

This is low-income subsidized housing for Plymouth elderly. Survey taken during the weekly coffee hour when about 1/3 of the residents gather for a business meeting and activities planning session. An interested group Some members had previously participated in the Senior Citizens Club survey and so did not participate.

Efforts To Survey Older Adults Not Affiliated With Traditional Senior Citizen Groups:

Groups and non-groups surveyed:

Organization meeting of the Plymouth-Northville branch of American Association of Retired Persons

An announcement that national members and other interested older adults were invited to attend an organizational meeting for a "different" kind of an older adult group prompted the survey of this group. Organizers of the group are determined that the group develop as a service and educationally-oriented group and used the results of the survey of this meeting to begin outlining a program for the coming year. Small study groups are planned to supplement the monthly meetings. Members interested in the survey and asked a number of questions.

St. Michael's Church, Livonia

The pastor agreed to allow the school gym to be used for the survey. Arrangements were made for the survey team to be on hand for two consecutive mornings following early morning mass. This was said to be a parish with many older members. A notice was written for the parish news and the retired men who usher and count the Sunday collection were to be briefed on the purpose of the survey and asked to talk to their neighbors and ask them to stop by. In addition, the survey was announced from the pulpit. A large sign announcing the survey was set up outside the open gym door. In two days--one person came in to participate.

Our Lady of Victory Church, Northville

The pastor agreed to promote the survey. He suggested that a notice be placed in the parish news one week previous to the survey. In addition, he would personally urge older members to attend the 7:00 A.M. mass the Sunday morning of the survey. Survey worker was given tables and chairs and situated in a breezeway between the two parking areas of the church. The pastor commented that he had tried a survey of older church members 5 years ago and had 4 participants. This survey resulted in 4 participants.

Westland Center

Westland Center was contacted in an attempt to reach large numbers of older adults unaffiliated with groups. A table was set up for the survey in the mall. No "soliciting" was allowed, and, unless people can right up to the table, the survey worker was unable to speak to them. Twenty-five people filled out questionnaires, twelve stopped to talk but would not take part, many older people read the sign and walked slowly past, five persons asked to mail questionnaires--none of these were received by Schoolcraft.

Observer Newspapers

This newspaper cooperated fully with the survey by printing news about the survey at various stages and finally publishing a photograph of an older adult being surveyed as well as the questions from the questionnaire. There was an explanation of the purpose of the survey and a request that interested older people participate by answering the questions and sending them to Schoolcraft College.

Eleven returns were received in time to be tabulated, four more were received later, for a total of fifteen returns from the newspaper article. It was felt that this was a good response, for the questions had been printed at the end of the article and set in regular newspaper columns--difficult to read.

Individuals

An attempt was made to interview individual, independent older adults, not affiliated with traditional Senior Citizen groups. A volunteer interviewed three such persons--this was rewarding personally, but too time-consuming to accomplish the purposes of the survey and no further individual interviews were made.